



File Code: 5140/1950

Date: October 16, 2008

Dear Interested Persons:

I am requesting comments on a proposal for the **Fiscal Year 2009 Prescribed Burning Project** for the Oconee Ranger District of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. Burning is proposed in Putnam, Jasper, Jones, Greene and Oglethorpe Counties. The proposal includes burning approximately 24,838 acres however, the actual burning that occurs each year averages between 10,000 and 20,000 acres, as this activity is highly dependent on weather and ecological conditions. Creation of new fireline, as needed, is included in this proposal but should be minimized by the use of existing firelines, roads, trails, and creeks. A list of the acres planned by compartment, Forest Plan management prescription and watershed is attached. Maps displaying the location of compartments are also attached.

Prescribed fire has long been used as a tool on the Oconee District in achieving multiple objectives. The Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (Forest Plan) sets an objective of burning approximately 16,000 acres per year on the Oconee within the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) habitat management area (OBJ-8.D-06) in order to meet the guidelines provided in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Recovery Plan for the species. Under the Forest Plan, an average of 30,000 acres per year across the Chattahoochee and Oconee Forests combined is to be burned as fuels treatment to reduce the risk and consequences of wildfire (OBJ-58.3) on the Forest and adjacent private lands. Fuels include anything that would readily ignite, e.g. pine needles, dead trees, and broken limbs, that have accumulated over a period of time. Reduction of fuels through the use of prescribed fire also has several other beneficial effects: it improves the quality of forage for many wildlife species, including, and in addition to, the RCW; increases species diversity in the understory; and improves visual quality and access for wildlife viewing, hiking and hunting. In areas of the Oconee where fire is used as a tool, the goal is to burn the areas every 3-5 years. Burning approximately 20,000 acres a year would allow the Forest to meet this goal.

The Oconee District is in the midst of a drought and is recovering from a severe southern pine beetle (SPB) infestation. More acres are planned than are actually expected to be burned to allow flexibility to respond to weather conditions, to burn safely, and to minimize smoke production. Typically, between 10,000 and 20,000 acres are burned each year. Site specific burn plans for each area identify the allowable parameters for burning including wind speed/direction and soil/fuels moisture. The environmental analysis for this project will include a biological evaluation addressing any potential effect of the project on federally listed species, an evaluation of any extraordinary circumstances pertinent to the project, and an evaluation of threat to any heritage resource.



Each prescribed burn is designed to maximize use of natural and human created firelines (existing firelines, creeks, roads, trails) and minimize the need for new dozer created control lines. In some compartments, it may be necessary to establish a fireline around openings created by recent southern pine beetle suppression actions to protect new growth. Almost all predominantly pine stands on the Oconee District are routinely burned every 3-5 years, generally in the late winter/early spring (February-April), although burning can occur at any time of the year that conditions are favorable. Some new firelines may be required to protect openings created by recent southern pine beetle activities and newly re-vegetated.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, scoping is being conducted on this project and your comments are requested. It is anticipated that the activities described fall within Category 31.2 (6) of Forest Service Handbook 1909.15: Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction. Examples included in the Handbook in this section include prescribed burning to control understory hardwoods in stands of southern pine and prescribed burning to reduce natural fuel build-up and improve plant vigor. The decision would likely be documented in a Decision Memo and the decision would be subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8.

If you would like to comment on this project or would like additional information, please contact me at (706) 485-1776, ext. 102 between the hours of 8:00 and 4:30 Monday through Friday, or at 1199 Madison Road, Eatonton GA 31024. Your comments must be postmarked or received by **November 7, 2008** and should include the following information:

1. Name, address, and (if desired) telephone number,
2. Title of the project (**Fiscal Year 2009 Prescribed Burning Project**), and
3. Specific facts or comments along with supporting information that I should consider in reaching a final decision.

I appreciate your interest in the Oconee National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Erin M. Bronk

ERIN M.BRONK
District Ranger

Enclosures (4)

FISCAL YEAR 2009 PRESCRIBED BURNS PLANNED
(by Compartment, Forest Plan Management Prescription, and Watershed)

Comp.	Management Prescription(s)	Watershed	Acres Planned
4	3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 8.D, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Rum Creek	349
5	3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 8.D, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Rum Creek	48
9	3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 8.D, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Rum Creek	511
10	3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 8.D, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Rum Creek	317
107	2.B.2, 6.B, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Big Sandy Cr.	1,649
108	2.B.2, 3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 6.B, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Rum Cr./Big Sandy Cr.	781
110	3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Rum Creek	1,347
111	3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Rum Creek	1,263
114	3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Rum Creek	898
117	3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 8.D.1, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Ocmulgee River – Rum Creek	798
135	0, 4.D, 4.H, 7.3.1, 8.D, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Big Cedar Creek	1,386
137	0, 4.D, 4.H, 7.3.1, 8.D, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Big Cedar Creek	1,087
139	0, 4.D, 4.H, 7.3.1, 8.D, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Big Cedar Creek	1,040
142	4.B.1, 4.H, 6.B, 7.E.1, 8.D, 9.H, 11	Murder Creek	827
145	4.B.1, 4.H, 6.B, 7.E.1, 8.D, 9.H, 11	Murder Creek	1,450
146	4.B.1, 4.H, 6.B, 7.E.1, 8.D, 9.H, 11	Murder Creek	1,427
147	4.B.1, 4.H, 6.B, 7.E.1, 8.D, 9.H, 11	Murder Creek	637
150	4.B.1, 4.H, 6.B, 7.E.1, 8.D, 9.H, 11	Murder Creek	480
152	4.B.1, 4.H, 6.B, 7.E.1, 8.D, 9.H, 11	Murder Creek	1,896
153	2.B.2, 5.A, 8.D, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Little R. -- Lower	946
155	2.B.2, 5.A, 8.D, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Little R. -- Lower	1,084
162	2.B.2, 5.A, 8.D, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Little R. -- Lower	999
165	3.B, 4.D, 4.E.1, 7.E.2, 9.H, 11	Oconee R.–Big Cr.	993
166	3.B, 4.D, 4.E.1, 7.E.2, 9.H, 11	Oconee R.–Big Cr.	1,806
174	0, 3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 5.A, 7.E.2, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Oconee River – Greenbrier Cr.	819
182	0, 3.B, 4.D, 4.H, 5.A, 7.E.2, 9.F, 9.H, 11	Oconee River – Greenbrier Cr.	854
Total			25,692

